



1783

Selections
from
Cincinnati Fourteen

Volume 3

Anderson House

The Society of the Cincinnati







Selections from *Cincinnati Fourteen*

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Table of Contents

“In Stone and Steel: The Construction of Anderson House” (Spring 2005, pages 18–27)	2
“Serving in Style: A Century of Art and Politics at Anderson House” (Spring 2005, pages 32–38)	16
“ <i>Some Scraps and More Shreds and Patches</i> : The Journals of Larz Anderson” (Spring 2005, pages 39–44)	23
“The Gardens at Anderson House” (Spring 2005, pages 45–56)	29
“The Secret Staircase” (Spring 2005, pages 129–30)	43



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IN STONE AND STEEL

THE CONSTRUCTION

By Emily Schulz,

Deputy Director and

Curator of Collections

Text



OF ANDERSON HOUSE

From 1902 through 1905, Anderson House rose on Massachusetts Avenue, a testament to the classical inspirations of Beaux Arts architecture and modern advancements in engineering. Most of the photographs that follow were taken from an album of photographs put together by Henry F. Withey, a draftsman with Little & Browne who was sent to Washington, D.C., to represent the Boston-based firm during the house's construction. From April 1903 to October 1904, Withey sent weekly photographic reports documenting the progress of the construction. In 1964, he donated the album, which contained his copies of the photographs, to the Society of the Cincinnati.

December 24, 1903.

Teams of men and horses built Anderson House using a combination of muscle power and modern ingenuity at a moment in history when powered machinery had not yet completely replaced picks and shovels. Workmen broke ground on the site and laid the granite foundation in the summer of 1902 and had finished the exterior by early 1904. According to a son of one of the workmen on the site, the draftsmen and other supervisors set up their base of operations in a temporary workshop in an alley behind what would become the south garden wall. Contemporary newspapers began anticipating the completion of the house as early as the fall of 1904, and were openly disappointed that the Andersons would not start entertaining for another year.

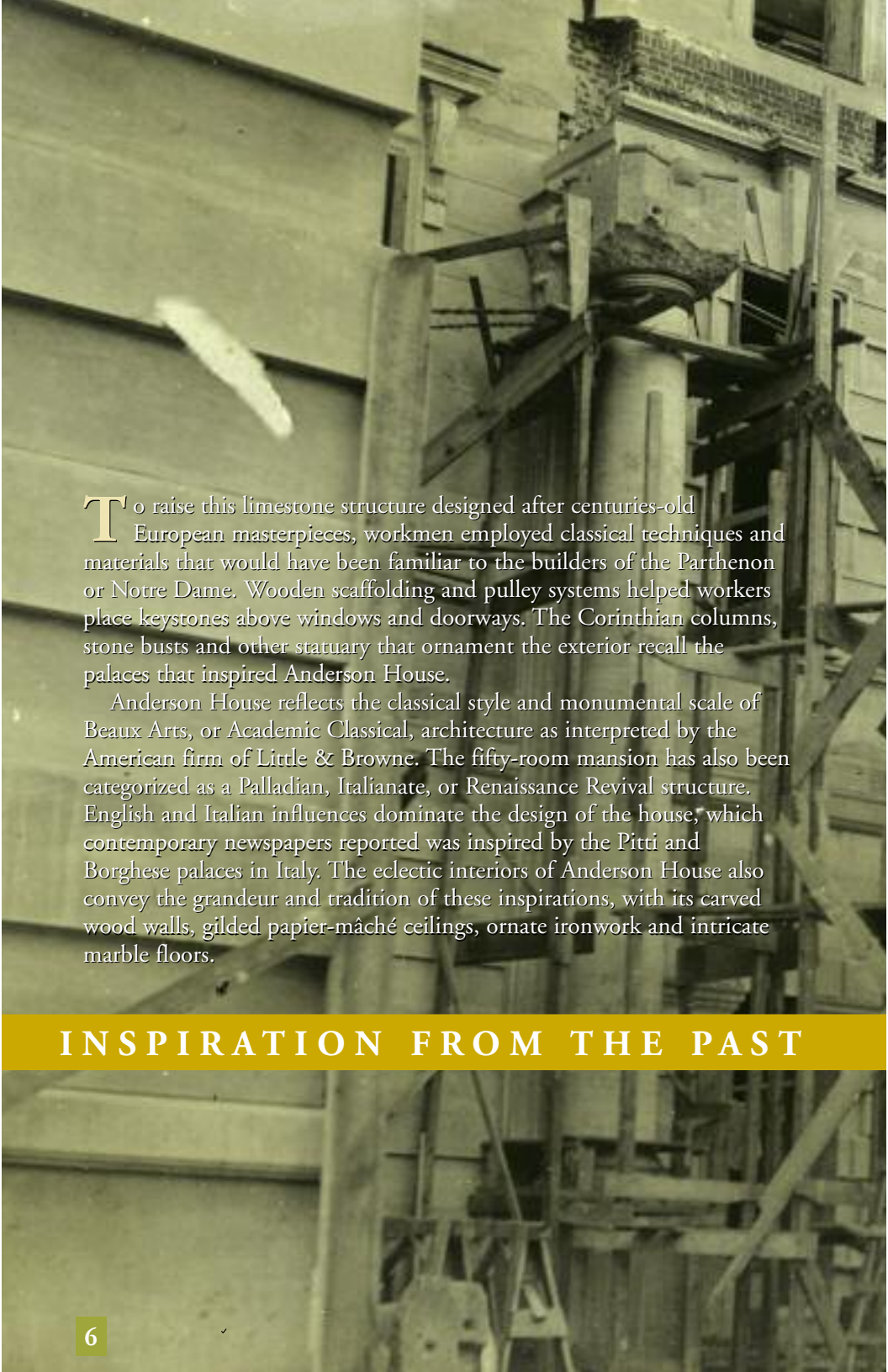


Above: Excavating the building site with the Walsh carriage house in the background, ca. September 1902.

Background: Horses pull a Corinthian column up Massachusetts Avenue, September 23, 1903.

LABORING TO BUILD A MANSION

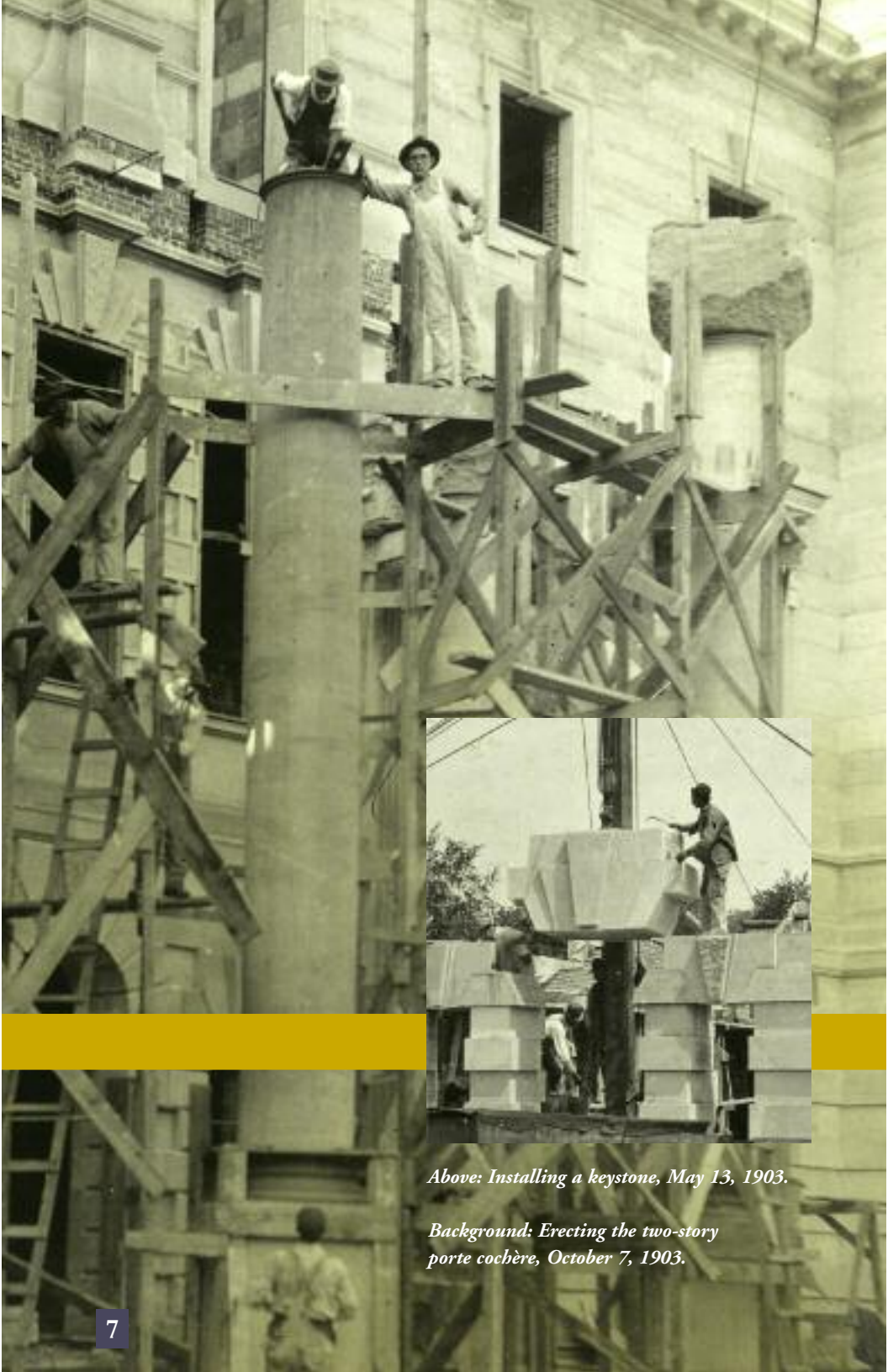




To raise this limestone structure designed after centuries-old European masterpieces, workmen employed classical techniques and materials that would have been familiar to the builders of the Parthenon or Notre Dame. Wooden scaffolding and pulley systems helped workers place keystones above windows and doorways. The Corinthian columns, stone busts and other statuary that ornament the exterior recall the palaces that inspired Anderson House.

Anderson House reflects the classical style and monumental scale of Beaux Arts, or Academic Classical, architecture as interpreted by the American firm of Little & Browne. The fifty-room mansion has also been categorized as a Palladian, Italianate, or Renaissance Revival structure. English and Italian influences dominate the design of the house, which contemporary newspapers reported was inspired by the Pitti and Borghese palaces in Italy. The eclectic interiors of Anderson House also convey the grandeur and tradition of these inspirations, with its carved wood walls, gilded papier-mâché ceilings, ornate ironwork and intricate marble floors.

INSPIRATION FROM THE PAST



Above: Installing a keystone, May 13, 1903.

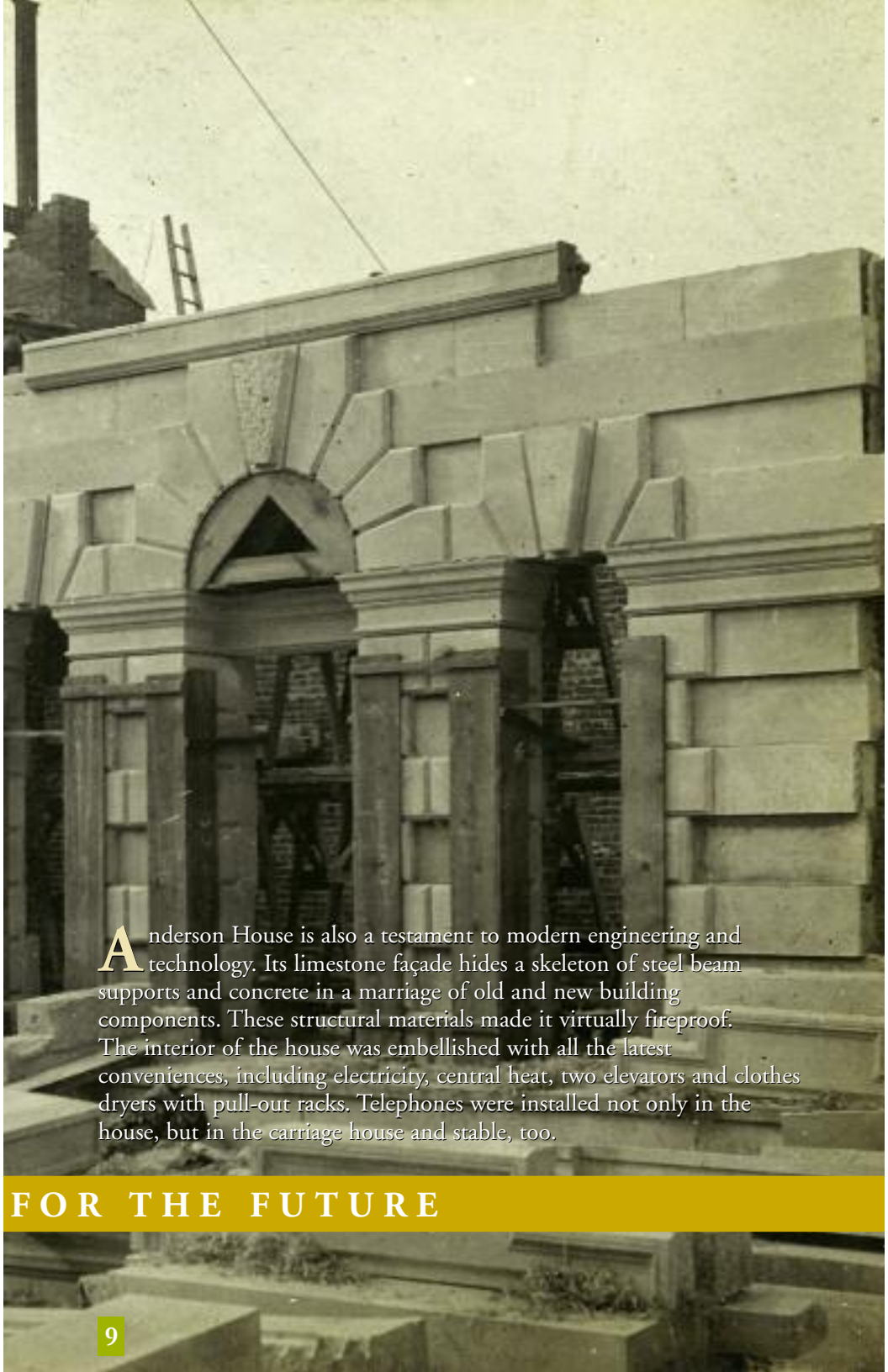
*Background: Erecting the two-story
porte cochère, October 7, 1903.*



Above: Building the garden façade, June 19, 1903.

Background: A tower of steel beams rises from the ground floor, May 13, 1903.

ADVANCEMENTS



Anderson House is also a testament to modern engineering and technology. Its limestone façade hides a skeleton of steel beam supports and concrete in a marriage of old and new building components. These structural materials made it virtually fireproof. The interior of the house was embellished with all the latest conveniences, including electricity, central heat, two elevators and clothes dryers with pull-out racks. Telephones were installed not only in the house, but in the carriage house and stable, too.

FOR THE FUTURE



Left: The Duncan Phillips house, as viewed from Anderson House on Christmas Eve 1903, became America's first modern art museum when Phillips opened his home to the public in 1921.

Background: Workmen gathered in the alley behind the house, ca. 1903.


ENTERTAINING THE WORLD IN

The completion of Anderson House drew attention from society reporters, architecture critics and socialites alike. The *Washington Post* heralded the development of the neighborhood with this description, from the perspective of Rock Creek Park to the north: "The splendid viaduct over the deep gorge of the stream, and in the distances looming up the Walsh and Anderson palaces, with the other fine examples of American architecture around and beyond them, give already more than a hint of what Massachusetts avenue will be to the Capital City in the way of a superb boulevard in a very few years now." In 1906 the Corcoran Gallery of Art validated Little & Brown's achievement when it featured photographs of what it considered a "large and ambitious house" in an architecture exhibition.

Credit for building this American treasure should go not only to its architects, but also to the unheralded laborers and craftsmen, most of whom remain unidentified. The Andersons would spend thirty-two years living and entertaining in their Washington home, where they received



WASHINGTON, D.C.



guests including presidents William H. Taft and Calvin Coolidge; King Albert I and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium; King Pradjadhipok and Queen Rambai Barni of Siam (now Thailand); Prince Andrew and Princess Alice of Greece; Sir Winston Churchill; General John J. Pershing; Henry A. du Pont; and members of the Vanderbilt family.

Credit for “entertaining the world” should go not only to the Andersons, but also to their household staff. The Andersons had twenty-one live-in servants, according to the 1910 census, ranging in age from fifteen to fifty-four. Little is known about them, but records indicate that they were white and able to read and write. Five were born in the United States (three in Massachusetts, one in New York, and one in Washington, D.C.), but the majority were born in other countries. These foreign-born servants came from Canada, England, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Scotland, Sweden and Switzerland. The Andersons also hired an unknown number of day laborers during the busiest seasons.

Anderson House in 1905—at a Glance

- Owners: Ambassador Larz Anderson III and Isabel Anderson
- Architects: Little & Browne, Boston, Mass.
- Construction: 1902-05
- Size: 11,000 square feet
- Rooms: 95, including storage areas, mechanical rooms and bathrooms
- Cost in 1905 dollars: \$837,928. The Andersons spent \$100,000 to buy the land, \$634,416 to build the house, \$60,446 to build the carriage house and stable, and \$43,066 on the grounds. (Totals include alterations completed in 1909 and 1911.)
- Timeline: the Andersons lived and entertained in the home during Washington's social season, roughly from New Year's Day to Easter, until the death of Larz Anderson in 1937. Isabel Anderson donated the house and its furnishings to the Society of the Cincinnati in 1938, and it was opened to the public as an historic house museum the following year.



*Stable interior,
May 1905.*

THE ANDERSONS' CARRIAGE HOUSE AND STABLE

No turn-of-the-century mansion was complete without a stable or carriage house, and the architects of the Andersons' Washington estate managed to fit both in one building. A three-story structure in an alley behind the garden housed cars and carriages on the first floor, horses on the second floor, and servants' quarters and a birch squash court on the third floor. The elaborate interiors were befitting of the award-winning horses and one-of-a-kind vehicles that Larz and Isabel rode through the city. At a cost of more than \$60,000, contemporary newspapers declared that the Andersons spent twice as much on their "equine palace" than any Washington resident had before.

The following series of photographs chronicles the construction of the building, which began in 1902 and took two years to complete. Each photograph was taken from the same perspective, facing south with the Washington Monument visible in the background. The carriage house and stable was demolished in the 1960s to make way for the Radisson Hotel on P Street.

Construction of the carriage house and stable begins, July 17, 1903.



August 28, 1903.



September 3, 1903.




*Construction was complete
by November 1903.*



*By Emily Schulz,
Deputy Director and
Curator of Collections*

The choir stall room was intended to introduce guests to the prestige and accomplishments of their hosts. H. Siddons Mowbray painted the insignia, including the Society of the Cincinnati eagle in the upper right, from sketches made by Larz Anderson.



SERVING IN STYLE A CENTURY OF ART AND POLITICS AT ANDERSON H O U S E

In the spring of 1905, newspapers from Washington, D.C., to Boston heralded the completion at long last of Anderson House, “a dream of beauty and good taste” with one of the capital city’s most fashionable addresses.¹ This Beaux Arts mansion was designed by Arthur Little and Herbert Browne of Boston as the winter residence of Larz Anderson III, an American diplomat, and his wife, Isabel Weld Perkins, an author and Red Cross volunteer. For more than thirty years the couple enjoyed Anderson House as a showcase for their art collection, a backdrop for high society galas, and a home from which they explored what they considered to be “the most

beautiful of American cities.”² One hundred years later, the Society of the Cincinnati—which received the house as a gift from Isabel Anderson in 1938 after her husband’s death—celebrates Anderson House as a monument to Beaux Arts architecture, a stage for international politics, and a symbol of patriotism.

At a cost of nearly \$740,000, “this Florentine villa in the midst of American independence” rose on Massachusetts Avenue between 1902 and 1905, complete with a walled garden, tennis court and three-story carriage house.³ The idea for a permanent home in Washington, D.C., where the rising diplomat could entertain American and foreign dignitaries in a grand setting, took hold while the Andersons were on their honeymoon. As Larz described it, Anderson House was “arranged for stately functions of a limited size, and its approaches and succession of rooms make a suitable background” for welcoming distinguished guests.⁴ By the turn of the century, Washington, D.C., had established itself as a cosmopolitan city with a culture and social life to rival that of New York and Boston. The allure of the national capital and its relatively open and forgiving social elite attracted wealthy but socially ignored families, particularly to its fashionable Dupont Circle neighborhood.⁵ But unlike these newcomers in search of acceptance, Larz already considered Washington his home. In 1881 his parents, Elizabeth and Nicholas Longworth Anderson, had moved with Larz and his younger sister, Elsie, from Cincinnati to Washington in search of more cosmopolitan surroundings. They settled in a home at the corner of 16th and K Streets designed for them by Nicholas Longworth Anderson’s Harvard classmate, Henry H. Richardson. Larz’s parents lived in the house for the remainder of their lives. Nicholas died in 1892, but Elizabeth lived until 1917, twelve years after Larz and Isabel moved to Massachusetts Avenue. With family and friends as neighbors, Larz and Isabel lived and entertained in Anderson House during Washington’s social season, which extended from New Year’s Day to Easter.

Unlike many of the Gilded Age elite, both Larz and Isabel Anderson were born into high society to families with old money and strong ties to the earliest generations of American history. The Andersons had been one of the most prominent families in Cincinnati, Ohio, since the early 1800s. The family owed its fortune to the post-Revolutionary War real estate ventures of Lt. Col. Richard Clough Anderson, as well as to a series of advantageous marriages that tied the family to the Clarks, Longworths and Tafts. Larz Anderson III, born in 1866 to Civil War hero Nicholas Longworth Anderson and Cincinnati socialite Elizabeth Coles Kilgour,

Larz and Isabel Anderson in the Anderson House garden, 1905. Photograph taken by Henry F. Witbey, a draftsman employed by Little & Browne of Boston, the architects who designed Anderson House.

Lower right: The Andersons purchased some unusual artifacts for their new home, such as the malachite vase sculpture that appears on this invoice and is now on display in the Olmsted gallery. Invoice from C. F. Woerffel in St. Petersburg to Larz Anderson, 1902. Anderson Family Papers, Society of the Cincinnati.



devoted his professional life to serving his country, first as adjutant general in the Spanish-American War (1898), and later as minister to Belgium (1911-12) and as ambassador to Japan (1912-13). When he retired from the diplomatic corps in 1913, Larz recalled that he was the first person to rise entirely through his ranks from the lowest post to the highest.

Isabel Anderson was born Isabel Weld Perkins in Boston in 1876, the only child of Civil War naval hero George Hamilton Perkins and Boston socialite Anna Minot Weld. The Welds had claimed their place among America's elite families as early as 1632, when Rev. Thomas Weld arrived in Massachusetts Bay. It wasn't until the mid-nineteenth century and the shipping business of William Fletcher Weld, Isabel's grandfather, that the family amassed a fortune that befitted their status. When Isabel inherited

\$17 million from her grandfather on her twenty-first birthday in 1897, just three months before she married Larz, the newspapers reported that the inheritance made her the richest woman in the country. Despite her elite social status, Isabel spent her life caring for the sick and wounded, writing fantastical stories to delight children, and contributing to churches, hospitals, and museums.

After their marriage, the newlyweds lived outside of Boston on an estate in Brookline, Mass., that they named Weld, in honor of Isabel's grandfather, but soon they were working with architects Little and Browne to design a home in Washington. Anderson House, built with significant input from the Andersons, reflects the classical style and monumental scale of Beaux Arts—or Academic Classical—architecture, as it developed in turn-of-the-century America. English and Italian influences dominate the design of the house, which is said to have been inspired by the Pitti and Borghese palaces in Italy.⁷

The five levels of Anderson House were planned to accommodate both the formal and intimate aspects of the Andersons' lives. The public entertaining spaces were confined to the first and second floors, generally on the west side of the house. Guests entered through the choir stall anteroom into the great stair hall and proceeded upstairs to be received by their hosts in the key room, before sitting down to dinner in either the dining room (for a party of thirty or less) or the ballroom. After dinner the gentlemen retired to either the smoking room on the west end of the winter garden or the billiard room to discuss politics over a game of cards or billiards. A few "family" spaces existed on these floors on the east side of the house. The east, or red, stair hall; the library; the breakfast room; the kitchen and pantries; and the servants' dining room and living room provided more intimate rooms for the Andersons and space for their servants. The second-floor Cypress room, now used as the Georgia suite, was Larz's private study. The third floor contained Larz and Isabel's separate bedroom suites and five guest bedrooms named after family friends, such as Robert Todd Lincoln and Wayne MacVeagh, along with bedrooms for six of the house servants and two rooms where servants of the Andersons' guests could stay. More servants' bedrooms existed on the fourth floor, or attic, in addition to the laundry and ironing room and general storage areas. The basement level was used for storing necessities such as wood and coal and the Andersons' stash of wines and liquors.⁸



Larz and Isabel enjoyed motoring in and around Washington so much that they had H. Siddons Mowbray paint murals of their favorite driving routes. His two murals were installed in the winter garden in 1909.



Anderson House was a monument to luxury, but also to modern technology and engineering. The limestone façades, marble floors and wood-paneled walls hide a combination of concrete and steel beam supports that was a novel building technique in 1902. Anderson House was also one of the first private homes in Washington to be built with electricity. This relatively new energy source powered lights, central heat, two elevators and clothes dryers with pull-out racks.

Larz and Isabel Anderson furnished their winter residence with fine and decorative art objects, partially in keeping with the Gilded Age elite's collecting standards. World-class examples of French and English period reproduction furniture, European tapestries, Old Master paintings, contemporary family portraits, Asian ceramics and carvings, and ancient Greek and Roman sculpture filled Anderson House. But unlike most of their peers, Larz and Isabel felt no need to adhere strictly to these conventions and also collected objects that reflected their personal interests, including religious artifacts, American historical artifacts, and not-yet-appreciated Asian screens and sculptures. The Andersons also assembled a renowned collection of automobiles and horse-drawn carriages, which they used to take daytrips around the region.

Perhaps the most important function of Anderson House was serving as the backdrop for high society galas given by the Andersons in honor of

prominent neighbors, presidents and kings. Anderson House also served a public role as the occasional residence of foreign dignitaries on official visits to the United States, as the federal government did not yet own a residence for this purpose (Blair House serves this role today). The 1919 visit of King Albert I and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium and the 1931 visit of the king and queen of Siam (now Thailand) came with the most fanfare. The Andersons employed twenty-one live-in servants and an unknown number of day laborers to handle the work of the household during the busiest seasons.⁹

Upon Larz Anderson's death in 1937, his widow oversaw the gift of Anderson House and its contents to the Society of the Cincinnati. Larz was a devoted member of the Society and felt such strong attachments to its principles that he incorporated scenes and symbols of American history into murals and other decorations throughout the house. The four walls of the key room bear sweeping images of American independence and freedom, and chronicle the Anderson family's service to its country in the American Revolution, Civil War and Spanish-American War. The Society eagle itself adorns the ceiling of the key room, watches over the great stair hall from the *tromp l'oeuil* mural over the fireplace, and is foremost among the insignia painted on the walls and ceiling of the choir stall room. To the Andersons, their Washington home represented the culmination of what America's founders, and many of the original members of the Society of the Cincinnati, hoped their capital city would become—a grand, modern city to rival the European capitals, but with a patriotic identity and sense of history that would make it distinctively American. Since 1939 this American treasure has been open to the public as a historic house museum where the Society has continued the traditions of collecting, entertaining, and serving one's country that the Andersons began one hundred years ago.

1. "Society Greatly Interested in Opening of the Anderson Palace," unidentified newspaper, ca. 9 August 1905.

2. Isabel Anderson, *Presidents and Pies: Life in Washington, 1897-1919* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), p. 5.

3. "Hon. Larz Anderson, Erection of House & Stable at Washington, D.C. #2118 Massachusetts Avenue," Little & Browne account book, Historic New England, Boston; "Society Greatly Interested."

4. Larz Anderson, *Larz Anderson: Letters and Journals of a Diplomat*, edited by Isabel Anderson (New York: Fleming H. Revell and Company, 1940), p. 606.


5. Kathryn Allamong Jacob, *Capital Elites: High Society in Washington, D.C., after the Civil War* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), chapters 6-7.

6. L. Anderson, *Letters and Journals*, 446.

7. Martha B. Maher, "Little and Browne: Masters of Composition and Selection," (unpublished paper, Collections of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities [now Historic New England], 1987), p. 22.

8. Architectural drawings for Anderson House and its carriage house, executed by the firm of Little & Browne in 1903, exist in the collections of Historic New England, Boston. Blueprints of the final designs are in the library collections of the Society of the Cincinnati.

9. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910 (Series T624, microfilm roll 150, page 7), National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.



Ambassador and Mrs. Larz Anderson (detail) by Philip de Laszlo
(Hungarian, 1869-1937), painted at Anderson House, 1926.
Of this joint portrait, Larz Anderson wrote: "It satisfied my
highest hopes, that it might prove an epitome of our life together."

*Some Scraps and More
Shreds and Patches*

THE JOURNALS OF LARZ ANDERSON

By Ellen McCallister Clark, Library Director

In the preface to *Larz Anderson: Letters and Journals of a Diplomat* (1940), Isabel Anderson wrote that she had drawn much of her memoir on her husband from “forty typewritten volumes [that] formed an almost complete account of his life.”¹ Her book, published three years after her husband’s death, has been a mainstay for our knowledge and understanding of the Andersons, but, as Mrs. Anderson herself notes, her selection of material “out of these thousands of pages” was limited by her publisher’s space constraints. Inspired by this tantalizing reference, the Society’s staff had searched over the years for the original journals, but, having found no trace of them, had concluded that the volumes probably had not survived.

Then, out of the blue, in February 2004, a letter arrived from Mrs. Larz Kennedy Anderson of Pittsboro, N.C. She and her husband had in their possession two boxes of Larz Anderson’s journals, and they wondered if the Society of the Cincinnati library might be an appropriate home for them. A delightful correspondence ensued that resulted in the library director’s drive to Pittsboro to pick up the boxes and bring them back to Anderson House.² The

“It had been a matter of considerable consideration as to what I should serve such a distinguished company, for I knew that they must inherit from their Revolutionary ancestors a hatred of prohibitions and a taste in wines.”
— Larz Anderson, 1932.

journals they contained have been closely examined and, indeed; they are the long-sought-after original volumes.

The Andersons’ gift comprises thirty-six leather-bound typewritten volumes, which span five decades: from 1888, the year Larz Anderson marked his graduation from Harvard University with a trip around the world, to 1936, the year before his death at age seventy. The individual volumes are numbered, on paper spine labels, 1 through 38 (vols. 28 and 35 are missing).³ The texts, which read as if they were composed at the end of a year or after a significant event, were perhaps drawn from earlier diary notes and correspondence. Several of the volumes contain loose memorabilia, such as photographs, menus and programs; a few are more nearly scrapbooks with many photographs, sketches, travel itineraries and letters pasted in.

Most of the volumes bear the general title *Some Scraps* embossed in gold on their covers, and each volume has an individual title indicating

its contents. These titles include: *Days in & out of London* (1891-92); *Our Wedding Journey and Our Trip to India* (1897-99); *Afloat and Ashore: From Florida to Alaska...* (1908); *An Embassy to Japan: Across Siberia and through Korea to Happy Days and Associations in Tokyo* (1913); *Africa Rediscovered by North Americans...* (1928). While the far-flung travels of the indefatigable Andersons are the principal subjects of the journals, the accounts of their adventures are often anchored by descriptions of their return to one of their homes, either to Weld in Brookline, Mass., or to Anderson House. Larz Anderson's particular attachment to and satisfaction with his Washington home is a recurring theme in the journals. On one return to Anderson House from a trip to the White Sulphur Springs spa toward the end of his life, he writes, "found the household perfectly established and the house more wonderful than ever (I think it the most wonderful house in America)."⁴

When not traveling, the Andersons usually spent their winters in Washington, D.C., opening Anderson House for the social season (early January to the beginning of Lent). Because of his diplomatic career, Larz Anderson was well connected politically, especially during the Theodore Roosevelt and Taft

years, but the Andersons clearly considered themselves to be Washingtonians first, with many close social friends whose status was not tied to any administration. Anderson's accounts of their time in Washington are peppered with strong political opinions and gossip, as well as glimpses of the whirl of social life among the city's elite in the early part of the twentieth century. As the years march along,



"I have always felt that in America we had no rights to coats of arms, but did to emblems of patriotic orders," Anderson wrote in reference to some of the architectural details of Anderson House. This cartouche, featuring the Society eagle, is in the great stair hall in a mural painted by Oreste Paltrinieri (Italian, b. 1873), 1909.

Anderson begins to bemoan the loss of old standards and traditions and writes longingly of the “old days.” An active member of the Republican Party whose name was at one time put forward as a vice presidential nominee, he seems to have surprised even himself when he became an enthusiastic supporter of Franklin Roosevelt and his “New Deal.”

Volume 37 of the journals covers the year 1932 and is titled *More Shreds and Patches*. In it Anderson recounts the circumstances surrounding a luncheon he gave at Anderson House for members of the Society of the Cincinnati. The occasion was the presentation of a copy of a portrait of General Lafayette to Arlington House, the estate built by George Washington Parke Custis that became the home of his more famous son-in-law, Robert E. Lee. The original painting from which the copy was made originally had hung, in succession, at Mount Vernon and Arlington House, and was then (as now) in the collection of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va. Anderson notes that he had helped fund the commission of the portrait's copy, which was first displayed in the replica of Mount Vernon erected at the Colonial Exposition near Paris earlier that year.⁵

Having heard that “a few” officers of the Society would assist with the presentation of the Lafayette portrait, Anderson writes:

So in my innocence, I said that I would be happy to have these few to luncheon on the day of the ceremonies before going out to Arlington House. What happened to the invitation list I don't exactly know, but after a short time over a hundred and twenty had accepted for luncheon and we were in for a real party. I hadn't realized that there were so many Members of the Cincinnati within hailing distance of Washington, but we shall make the best of it....⁶

Anderson goes on in his journal to reveal that this was one of the largest gatherings ever held at Anderson House, and it was, in fact, the first time the “saloon” (now referred to as the ballroom) had been used for a seated meal. His evident pleasure in hosting the event comes through in his vivid description of the setting and company, which is quoted here in full:

This was quite a large order as of course, I wanted to make a success of the affair, and I felt that our house might be an especially suitable place for a gathering of the Cincinnati (of which I am so proud to be a member) because there had been introduced into its architecture so many features that commemorated the famous Society. The Eagle appears in the pediment over the main portico entrance (as well as the Cross of the Loyal Legion and the Spanish War). It appears in the fresco of

the Choir Stall lobby (with frescos of many other organizations with which IA and I have been associated—for I have always felt that in America we had no rights to coats of arms but did to emblems of patriotic orders.) It appears in the fresco above the fireplace of the hall at the foot of the great staircase, and in the ceiling of the saloon. But in the room at the top of the staircase I had commemorated the Society in the Mowbray wall paintings, with scenes which were rather unusual. So I felt the house was ready to receive the fellow members of the Society, no matter how many came.

This large luncheon also gave us a chance to make use of an arrangement which we had made when we built the house, for we had placed a large pantry next [to] the saloon so that the saloon could be served in case we wished to set tables in it. The flying staircase in fact had been included in the saloon so that a dinner company might pass down the stairs and see below the table set with the servants about, making a rather fine effect as I had once seen in a London house....

So I worked out the plan in our own house so that in case, some day, we had to seat more people than we could do comfortably in the dining room (in which on the occasion of Mr. Taft's inauguration I had been able to seat eighty at small tables) we could use the lower pantry and seat, as we did in this instance, some hundred and thirty comfortably at small tables. It was rather interesting after all these years, almost thirty years, to find this arrangement ready to take care of our brothers and sisters (for wives had been included in the invitations) of the "Cincinnati," who sat with the Eagle of the Order looking down on them from its place in the coffered ceiling.

It worked out very well. We had a large table at the end for the French Ambassador

Page from Larz Anderson's journal describing an excursion aboard the Olaf Kyrre along the coast of Norway, 1889.



and Madame Claudel; the Assistant Secretary of War (who was to receive on behalf of the Government the portrait at the ceremonies) [Frederick H.] Payne, and his wife; and various presidents of State Societies who were present; Dr. [William H.] Wilmer, most famous of eye surgeons, President of the Cincinnati in the State of New Jersey; Randall Webb, President of the Society in the State of Maryland; and Collins Daves, President of the Society in the State of North Carolina, who a few days later was elected National President at the General Meeting in Philadelphia. This was the only table of honour, all the others made up the smaller tables to complete the company of many so distinguished names that recalled the descent from that group of Officers of the American Army, after the Revolution, who, “in most solemn manner,” associated, constituted and combined themselves into a Society of Friends, in order to perpetuate the remembrance “of the vast event” and the mutual friendships which had been formed under pressure of common danger and had been cemented by the blood of the parties. And of this famous brotherhood, General George Washington (whose Bicentennial was at this very time [1932] being celebrated) was first President.

It had been a matter of considerable consideration as to what I should serve such a distinguished company, for I knew that they must inherit from their Revolutionary ancestors a hatred of prohibitions and a taste in wines⁷—and yet I felt that cocktails, while characteristically American, were really modern and vulgar. So I decided on sherry and champagnes, and set a table with sherry and biscuit at the end of the gallery which might be seen by all who passed and which, apparently—as many seemed to think that it was their last as well as their first chance—was well patronized. So it may have been an especially grateful surprise when they found champagne served them at luncheon. They were moderate, really, in their appreciation, for only a dozen bottles of sherry were drunk up and fifty bottles of Lanson wine at table. If there were any success to the party I think these reminders of Colonial days when we enjoyed a certain personal freedom may have helped a bit. At any rate, afterwards, all seemed able to find their way out to lovely Arlington where the portraits were presented and received with proper speeches, and that opportunity was over.⁸

Notes:

1. Isabel Anderson, *Larz Anderson: Letters and Journals of a Diplomat* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940), p. [7].
2. The donor, Larz Kennedy Anderson, is a first cousin, twice removed, of Ambassador Larz Anderson of Anderson House; Larz K. Anderson's great-grandfather, William Pope Anderson, and Ambassador Anderson's father, Nicholas Longworth Anderson, were brothers. The journals had descended to Mr. Anderson from an uncle, Alexander Fergusson Anderson.
3. In *Letters and Journal of a Diplomat*, Isabel Anderson refers to boyhood journals that are probably added into her count of forty volumes.
4. Larz Anderson, *Journals*: Vol. 38, p. 69.
5. In setting the stage for his story, Larz Anderson recounts several other personal connections to the event: he represents in the Society Col. Richard Clough Anderson, who was an aide to Lafayette; Robert E. Lee had been a classmate of his “grand-Uncle Robert Anderson—Robert Anderson of ‘Fort Sumter’ as he came to be called;” and “Roony Lee,” Robert E. Lee's son, had been a classmate and great friend of Anderson's father, Nicholas Longworth Anderson, at Harvard.
6. Larz Anderson *Journals*: Vol. 37, p. 10.
7. Prohibition would not be repealed until the following year, 1933. In his journal for 1929 (vol. 33, p. 17), Larz Anderson had written: “I had pre-war liquors and wines in our cellars before even prohibition (before even the District dried up) to serve with perfect legality when officials were present; and I still left unopened a cellar of pre-war wines for future use.”
8. Larz Anderson *Journals*: Vol. 37, pp. [22-25].



The Gardens *of Anderson House*

By Julia Blakely

Conservation and Collection

Development Librarian

*Larz Anderson under wisteria in one of the gardens
at Weld, the Anderson's estate in Brookline, Mass.*

In a city that contains some of the most famous gardens in America on what were once private estates, the gardens of Anderson House do not come immediately to mind. The house's landscape, however, remains largely intact from the period of Isabel and Larz Anderson, who also created gardens at Weld, their Brookline, Mass., home outside of Boston. The Weld gardens were one of the country's most celebrated gardens in the first half of the twentieth century. Today, the home and its gardens have essentially vanished from their setting, but traces of Weld's significance and its importance to the Andersons' lives can be found on the walls of Anderson House and in the archives of historic photographs and manuscripts in the Society of the Cincinnati library.

This view of the Italian garden at Weld shows the wall fountain, ca.1910.



Weld and the Italian Garden

The fleet of ships that sailed under the Black Horse flag provided William Fletcher Weld with a fortune that would be left, in part, to his granddaughter, Isabel Weld Perkins, the future Mrs. Larz Anderson. A good portion of her inheritance went toward purchasing, from her cousin in 1899, a sixty-four-acre estate on a crest in Brookline overlooking Boston, and transforming it into an astounding world of the Andersons' making. Many of the elements in Anderson House reflect the designs or settings of Weld, and to fully appreciate the home in Washington it is necessary to understand something of their estate in Brookline.

Weld, of course, was named in honor of Isabel's grandfather, whose summer house had once stood at the northeast corner of what would become the estate's Italian garden. Charles A. Platt introduced the classical Italian garden to the United States in a two-part article for *Harper's* magazine in 1893 and in his book *Italian Gardens*, published the following year. The aesthetic of Platt's Italian garden—geometric in shape and constructed on an axis, emphasizing the flow between the villa and the terraced gardens and grounds—appealed to wealthy American patrons who wanted something different from the rigid French parterres of Newport chateaus and the pastoral landscapes exemplified by Frederick Law Olmsted. The Italian influence quickly caught on, as reflected by Edith Wharton's *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904) and the wide publicity given to the Andersons' Italian garden at Weld, an important early commission for Platt that was largely completed in 1901.

Of all the areas of the vast Weld estate, which also included a Japanese garden (1907), a water garden (1910), a Chinese garden (1910), a deer park, and even a woodland gnome garden, the Italian garden was for the Andersons—who had met in Italy and later honeymooned there—the most sentimental and personal. "Early in October the gardens were still gorgeous, their coloring intensely brilliant. We walked among the fountains and columns that recalled the blessed times we had spent together,"¹ Larz wrote in his journal. A mural in Weld's winter garden depicted Rome's Spanish Steps, complete with an actual boat-shaped fountain, another romantic memento of the Andersons' first meeting.



Little remains today of the glorious gardens of Weld, but their fame can be gleaned from some of the original photographs and captivating descriptions found in several publications in the Society of the Cincinnati library. Titles available in the library include “The Garden of ‘Weld’” by George F. Pentecost in *The Architectural Record* (May 1903); *American Estates and Gardens* (1906) by Barr Ferree; *One Hundred Country Houses: Modern American Example* (1909) by Aymar Embury II; and *Beautiful Gardens in America* (1915) by Louis Shelton. Larz must have been pleased with this attention. In his journal for the year 1929 he included a “List of Bound Magazines Containing Articles concerning Weld Gardens, Anderson Bridge and Home Houses.”² There are twenty-six citations. Among the early photographs of the couple’s library in Anderson House is one of the fireplace: on one side Larz had hung a framed *Town and Country* cover of the March 12, 1904, issue featuring Weld; on the other side, he had hung the design of the Weld bookplate.

The Weld bookplate, one of the Andersons’ personal bookplates, can now be found in volumes once owned by the Andersons and now on the shelves of the Society’s research library or in what is known today as the members’ library. The bookplate’s etched scene presents a conflated view of the Italian garden framed by antique herms, which stood like sentries at the garden entrance, and emblems of Larz’s military societies. The Society of the Cincinnati eagle crowns the scene. The bookplate was designed by Sidney Lawton Smith (1845-1929), a well-known Boston-based artist favored by prominent book collectors.

The Anderson House Murals


Perhaps the clearest indication of the significance of the Italian garden to the Andersons is the fact that they had it “exported” to their Washington home in the murals that appear on the two walls of the house’s breakfast room. The Anderson House murals, according to a 1911 inventory, were painted by Karl Julius Heinrich Yens (or Jens) (1868-1945), a German-born painter, illustrator and etcher, although they are frequently attributed to H. Siddons Mowbray, who did several murals in Anderson House, notably the historic scenes in the key room. The breakfast room murals, in



contrast, feature looser brushstrokes reminiscent of John Singer Sargent's sun-dappled painting, *Breakfast in the Loggia* (c.1910). They are certainly more casual in nature than the historic scenes and *trompe l'oeil*-painted architecture found elsewhere in the house, although they are, of course, landscapes. These landscapes feature the hallmarks of Platt's landscaping style, including his use of loggias, pergola, columns, water, sculpture and tubbed topiary amongst abundant plantings of flowers.

NORTH WALL MURAL

The breakfast room's north wall, which faces out towards the garden, depicts the most frequently reproduced vantage of Weld: the main part of



The colonnade of the Italian garden and its prized Holland bay trees, ca.1910.

the Italian garden. This area was reached by various walks, including two through loggias, to a center portion of a terrace, which featured a wall fountain that was framed by massive amphorae from the Palazzo Piombino in Rome. The plaque over the fountain, only partially legible in the mural, reads: "This Garden Was Made in 1901 and Named Weld." An article in the March 1904 issue of *House and Garden* explains other elements of the scene: "The terraces reached from the grove are terminated at the outer ends by gazebos. If permitted by a supercilious parrot, who lords it from his perch under one of them, we may enter one of these pavilions."³

The small colonnaded structure (called a gazebo in some of the contemporary writings) that is seen in the background of the mural marks the site of the original Weld home. Isabel's parrot, Polly, sits in the center of the composition, while a macaw named Anna appears over the lintel of the entranceway to the ballroom, pecking at some of the grapes stolen from the vines growing on the pergola that overlooks the scene. A bird cage sits atop one of the antique columns from Cordova. An actual half balustrade, cleverly echoing the painted one, is worked into the wall of both murals, acting not only as a chair rail, but as the visual reference point for both scenes.

EAST WALL MURAL

The "cupid fountain," brought from Florence by Platt, dominates the composition of the east wall mural, which faces the length of the loggia-like space. Visible behind the fountain is the pergola where the Andersons' displayed their collection of topiary boxwood, purchased in Holland in 1902 and 1904. The Andersons must have employed highly skilled pruners, as the scene also depicts clipped hedges in the shape of a dog, a figure in a hat and carefully clipped bay trees in square fruit tree tubs (first fashioned for Louis XIV's beloved *potager* at Versailles and known in Europe as orange tree tubs). At Weld the clipped trees in their tubs would have been moved into a building on the estate during the winter.⁴

The Interior Gardens of Anderson House

The Anderson House property had little room for greenhouses and cutting gardens, so the home's interior—particularly the formal, public rooms—were decorated with aid from the gardens of the Andersons'

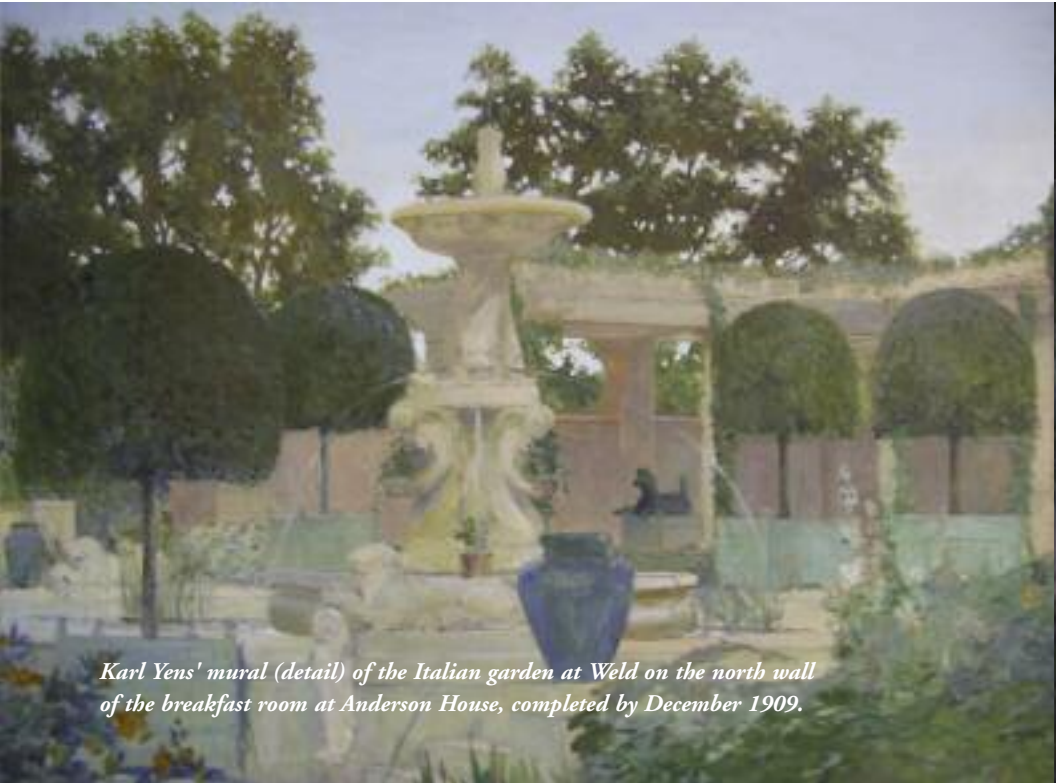
established estate. Potted and cut flowers and shrubs were brought down from Weld and used profusely, throughout the Andersons' occupancy, to bring the beauty of the gardens indoors. The winter garden, appropriately, was the room most filled with plants, including ivy creeping up the trellis, but there were also vases of flowers on Larz's desks in the library and billiard room; palms lining the great stairs, the gallery and the musicians' gallery; and potted hydrangeas, azaleas and daisies scattered throughout the house. Early photographs even show terracotta containers in the niches of the "saloon," or ballroom, where seated Buddhas now preside.

In addition to these early photographs, which include those taken in 1905 to document the completion of the house and the beautiful 1910 prints of well-known photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864-1952), Larz's typescript journals also provide evidence that the Andersons' enjoyment of their Weld gardens extended to Anderson House. Reporting on the couple's entertaining in 1929, Larz wrote, "The dinners proved quite a success, the house looked beautifully [sic], full of flowers, great gorgeous azaleas from Brookline, orchids, lilies and tulips, all so well arranged by Oshige San (our Japanese gardener from 'Weld' who came to Washington with the household to take care of the flowers)."⁵ Isabel kept an orchid plant in the entrance hall at Weld so she could snip off blossoms for departing visitors, but it is not known if she had this tradition in Washington.

Although not documented in either the photographs or the journals, it is tempting to think that some of the bonsai trees kept at Weld were brought down to Anderson House. Larz had developed a keen interest in bonsai during his post-graduate trip to Japan in 1889, when he returned with two dwarf maples. At the end of his ambassadorship to that country in 1913, he purchased at least forty varieties of bonsai from the Yokohama Nursery. This purchase was one of the earliest bonsai collections to be imported into the United States.⁶

The Larz Anderson Bonsai Collection can be seen today at Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum, located in Jamaica Plain, Mass., near Brookline. The arboretum sits on land that was originally part of a 278-acre tract given in 1643 to Capt. Joseph Weld, whose descendants started the family fortune by farming the land, before they expanded to shipping. The area of the arboretum where the institution for the scientific study of trees and shrubs is located was one of the most active centers of horticultural research in this country up until the 1930s.⁷

Background: The Weld bookplate.



Karl Yens' mural (detail) of the Italian garden at Weld on the north wall of the breakfast room at Anderson House, completed by December 1909.

The North Garden and Front Entrance

Wealthy residences began to be built in Washington's Dupont Circle neighborhood in the 1870s. By the turn of the century, when construction on the Andersons' Italian Renaissance house began, it was the beginning of the end of the neighborhood's peak as a fashionable area of open spaces; still, Anderson House was of the *belle époque*, from about 1900 to 1917, of stately Massachusetts Avenue homes. Today a green and quiet approach leads from Massachusetts Avenue to an imposing screen wall and the Anderson House façade, presenting to the world an austere front that once was softened by towering elms that lined both sides of the public sidewalk.

Great care was taken at Anderson House to present a distinguished entrance. In an interview for this article, Herbert Wright Jr., the son of Herbert Wright, who served as the head gardener at Anderson House for fifty years, recalled that Larz was particularly fastidious about the expanse of turf in the north (front) garden. When it was planted, he had several inches of earth carted away and replaced with topsoil that had been put through a sieve so that no gravel would remain.



The east wall mural (detail), completed by December 1909.

Making one's way over the north lawn, the transition from public front to private space began. The transition continued through the imposing screen wall via one of two Tuscan gated archways, semicircular in shape with ivy growing up the columns. In the Andersons' time a partial garland of flowering and evergreen shrubs lined the wall, which is today fronted by clipped holly, box and dogwoods.

By design, the lawn and carriage courtyard, located on the other side of the wall, provided the Andersons and their guests with privacy and a formal sense of transition from the street. A two-story Corinthian portico, which continues to dominate the forecourt today, provided shelter. The space was enlivened by topiary contained in pots and wooden boxes (tree tubs), but, otherwise, it was as simple in its landscaping—really, hardscaping—as it is today.

The South Garden

The south (back) garden exists today in the same size and odd trapezoid shape that the Andersons had created. As with many construction details, the planner of the garden is not known, although it seems likely that it



The south garden at Anderson House today.

was the building's architects, Little and Browne, working closely with Larz. Unfortunately, his early typescript journals, filled with the Andersons' far-flung travels, diplomatic appointments and obligations, contain little mention of the building activity on Massachusetts Avenue, and the 1905 blueprints of draftsman Henry F. Withey, who oversaw the construction, indicate the landscaping by nothing more than the word "Garden."

An Anderson House guidebook from the 1940s claims that the two large magnolia trees that shade the south garden terraces were fully grown at the start of the house's construction,⁸ suggesting that the designers were constrained by the small space that had been dictated by the existing public alleys. Today, the south garden is shaded by holly, pines and towering magnolias, some espaliered along the original brick and limestone walls that, lacking awkward angles, manage to give the impression that the garden is larger than it is.

It is not possible from early photographs to determine the prevailing style of the south garden, but it is likely that it was predominately Italian. It certainly employed statuary, including two cast iron sphinxes, which remain on guard today, and a nineteenth-century copy of the Farnese *Hercules at Rest*. In contrast to the restraint of the north (front) garden, the south garden at one time featured expanses of grass with meandering gravel paths and many flowering shrubs, as well as various architectural elements, such as pieces of columns.

Herbert Wright Jr. recalls the extremely labor-intensive manner of the planting and upkeep of the south garden—a doubly difficult task in hot, humid Washington, especially in an enclosed area with limited air circulation. He particularly recalls the tending of the rose bushes and wisteria that grew along the walls at either end of the garden. There is a wonderful undated photograph in the collections of the Society of the Cincinnati library of a proud Larz standing under a huge cascade of wisteria at his garden in Weld (see page 45).

Anderson House was designed for lavish entertaining that clearly extended into the south garden. The loggia-like space of the breakfast

room, winter garden and card room, with their expanse of glass-paneled French doors and windows, enabled ease of access to the gardens outside and, compared with the formality of the grand front entrance, relative informality. One can imagine Larz retreating with guests onto one of the terraces, smoking a cigar and talking politics.

By 1920 Larz was displaying great pride of place. He described in his journals a garden that had grown in stride with the opulence of the house. The Andersons were “camping out” in the off-season and were pleased to find

never was the garden so beautiful, for the late season had delayed the flowering shrubs so that all came out together, the deep red double Japanese peach, behind it the pink peach, to one side the white, with a blazing row of red wild azalea below—and to the other side the wall was a mass of lovely dropping wisteria (against backgrounds of green). Later the laburnum and snowball and rhododendron were to bloom!⁹

Conclusion

Larz’s journals of the 1930s record his dismay over the accelerating pace of new construction, particularly of apartment buildings, around his Washington home, and, as the city’s suburbs expanded, over the increasing traffic on Massachusetts Avenue. In February 1935 he “found the house as beautiful and comfy as ever with everything arranged as in old times, inside the house, but outside all was going to pot.”¹⁰ But he always seemed to find refuge and solace within his home and garden:

But our household was running like clockwork and inside the house everything was —perfect! The house looking more beautiful than ever and the service complete. And outside, the front lawn had never been so green and neat, in almost perfect condition; while the garden behind was in full leaf if not in as full flower as usual, for the flowering shrubs and the wisteria had been rather puzzled by the unusual season of weather. The cardinal red birds had come back as usual and the turtles reappeared, in fact one or two more little ones added to the family.¹¹

Today, despite being visually hemmed in by larger buildings on three sides and the selling off of the Andersons’ carriage house and tennis court that had been across the public alley to the south, the setting of Anderson House remains much as it was in the Andersons’ day. But no garden is frozen in time and changes inevitably occur, even in the most meticulously maintained landscapes. Trees and plants die, sometimes from disease, or maybe they grow too large or in an unanticipated way; changes in climates and light and pollution have their effects; a space’s function evolves.

In a 1983 restoration project honoring the bicentennial of the Society of the Cincinnati's founding, a reflecting pool was put in the south garden, where once there had been flowering shrubs. The pool offers a visual respite in the hot summer months and a focal point at night when illuminated. The sculpture in the garden now includes the large, bronze, seated Shakyamuni Buddha that once blessed guests at the front door.¹²

Since they left no explicit provisions, the Andersons most likely never intended the gardens to serve as monuments to their tastes and lives for the admiration of the public, as was the case with the nearby gardens of the Blisses' Dumbarton Oaks (1920) and the fabulously wealthy Marjorie Merriweather Post's Hillwood (1955). The Andersons indulged in what is perhaps the ultimate luxury: the creation and tending of gardens as private worlds to be enjoyed during one's own lifetime. The son of the head gardener at Anderson House emphasized Larz's insistence that everything be "just so" and how no expense was ever spared for the gardens.

After World War II, when Isabel deeded the sixty-four acres of Weld to the town of Brookline for recreational, charitable or educational purposes, she must have realized that it could not be maintained as it had been without legions of manpower, but she probably could not have imagined just how quickly the estate fell apart from neglect and vandalism. By 1958 an ice skating rink had been built in the middle of the Italian garden, complete with a refrigeration building and a ticket booth. Only part of the "cupid fountain" was saved by the town. But, given her charitable work, one suspects that she would be pleased that the Brookline Community Gardens grow in what is now known as Larz Anderson Park. One also can believe that Larz would be proud that his small but immaculately cared-for parcel of private, open-air space—the south garden of Anderson House—still offers a buffer and peaceful retreat from the bustle of the outside world.

Notes

1. Isabel Anderson, *Larz Anderson: Letters and Journals of a Diplomat* (New York, 1940), p. 575).

2. Anderson Journals: Vol. [34], p. 213.

3. "T., E." "The Garden of 'Weld' upon the Estate of Captain Larz Anderson of Brookline, Mass. Designed by Charles A. Platt, *House and Garden*, March 1904, p. 109.

4. Richard G. Kenworthy, "Bringing the World to Brookline: the Gardens of Larz and Isabel Anderson," *Journal of Garden History*, 1991, vol. 11, no. 4, p. 228.

5. Anderson Journals: Vol. [33], 16. There were a series of Japanese gardeners with their unique skills, including one who studied for a doctorate at Columbia University while employed by the Andersons.

6. Peter Del Tredici, "The Larz Anderson Bonsai Collection," *Arnoldia* 49 (3), Summer 1989, p. 10.

7. Del Tredici, pp. 2-27.

8. Anderson House: National Headquarters and Museum of the Society of the Cincinnati: Washington, D.C. [Washington, D.C., ca.1941], p. 10.

9. Anderson Journals, Vol. 20, p. 1.

10. Anderson Journals, Vol. [38], p. 68.

11. Anderson Journals, Vol. 37, p. 12.

12. James M. Goode. *The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C.* (Washington, D.C., 1974), p. 296.



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The Secret Staircase

Anderson House is filled with mysteries and hidden treasures. Few are more intriguing than the secret staircase, which has delighted generations of Society children (and a few adults, too).

Anderson House was designed as a modern building of steel and concrete, disguised by traditional walls of limestone and marble that reflect the nineteenth-century cultural preoccupations of its owners. The popular literature of Larz and Isabel's generation is laced with hair's-breadth escapes and secret liaisons. Trapdoors, secret passages, sliding bookcases and other gothic inventions were stock features of the nineteenth-century imagination.

The Andersons' secret staircase descends from the third floor through what appears to be a simple closet door in the Virginia suite down to a hidden landing inside the wall at the end of the Andersons' long gallery (now called the Olmsted gallery), near the entrance to the French reception room. The hidden landing is directly behind one of the



You can enter the secret staircase from the Olmsted gallery—if you know where to find it!



The staircase's hidden landing, (not) shown in 1905. The landing is directly behind the mirrored door in the top right of the photo, overlooking the ballroom.

mirrored doors overlooking the ballroom. A small hole scratched long ago in the mirror's silver provides a private view of the ballroom.

The hidden landing communicates with the long gallery through a doorway disguised in the gallery's elaborate paneling. The doorway is easily opened from the inside. But on the gallery side, the latch is disguised in the elaborately carved molding at the edge of a panel. Depressing a single, egg-shaped element camouflaged in the woodwork operates the latch. Like a sliding bookcase operated by tilting a particular volume, you have to know which bit of woodwork to press to reveal the secret passage.

Why did the Andersons build the secret staircase, and what did they use it for?

The stock answer is that Larz liked to slip down to the hidden landing to look through the peephole to see which guests had arrived in the ballroom before making a grand entrance. But that seems slightly implausible. Proper hosts like the Andersons would have received their guests personally, long before the guests reached the ballroom. The prosaic answer that the staircase served as a fire escape is more plausible. The Andersons were deeply afraid of a house fire, and Anderson House was built to the highest fire safety standards of the time. The secret stairway provided an alternative escape route in the event the family stairs were blocked by flame.

If it was a fire escape, why did the Andersons disguise the lower entrance with a trick door hidden in the paneling? Perhaps they simply wanted to avoid anything as utilitarian as a fire door in their long gallery. But perhaps they simply had a healthy sense of fun.



